

My name is Ron Robbins, and I am dairy and crop farmer from Sackets Harbor, NY. My wife, Nancy, and I own a diversified agricultural business that includes a 4000 acre crop operation, a 500-cow dairy, a trucking, grain drying and soybean roasting service, and an agri-tourism business.

The crop operation includes 4000 tillable acres on which we grow corn, soybeans, wheat, barley, alfalfa, hay, and provides all feed and forages for the dairy. North Harbor Dairy is our 500 cow dairy operation. We currently milk just over 450 cows each day and raise 600 head of dairy replacements of various ages. Robbins Corn & Bulk Service includes trucking, a grain drying and soybean roasting facility with storage capacity for 150,000 bu of grain, and related infrastructure. Old McDonald's Farm, was founded by Nancy in 1986, and this enterprise includes over 200 farm animals, a children's gift shop, tours of the dairy facilities, a farm market, and ice cream cafe. Open May 1st to October 31st, this business attracts thousands of visitors each year and provides an opportunity for our non-farm guests to learn about modern agriculture.

Nancy and I began our farm in 1977, with 100 acres of rented land. In 1989, we bought out the family's 70 cow- dairy, and grew the herd to 100, until 2001, when we expanded to the current 500-cow operation. Since 1977, we have transformed, and in some cases, merged, our four agricultural enterprises, to the point where we feel our business is an example of how a small family farm can grow, add value to its products, and maintain, and expand upon, its viability and profitability.

The farm that Nancy and I own is a fourth generation operation, and it is moving towards a fifth generation. Our son Brian, age 27, is the assistant crop manager. He left New York in 2000 to attend Colorado State University, and stayed in Colorado for two years after graduation, working for USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service. He returned to the farm in 2004. Our daughter Julia, age 24, worked with her mother at Old McDonald's Farm since it's beginning, when Julia was just 3 years old. Julia graduated from SUNY Cortland in 2004, and went to work for USDA Rural Development. Last fall, she took a position in St. Louis at an advertising agency specializing in agricultural clients, but returned home in May. She is currently the marketing director and manager at Old McDonald's Farm. Our other son Jeffery, age 25, is a fourth grade teacher at the local school, Sackets Harbor Central.

Since its inception, our farm has been involved with federal price support programs, including currently, the Direct and Counter cyclical Program (DCP), Marketing Loan Program, Price Support Loan Program, Loan Deficiency Payments (LDP), Farm Storage Facility Loan Program, and MILC.

In the past few years, New York has evolved from a grain deficit state to a grain surplus state. This shift has caused basis levels to erode in our cash markets over the past several years, to the point where commodity program payments provide a significant contribution to a crop producer's overall farm profitability—even in a fringe state like New York. Data for Fiscal Year 2005 reveals nearly \$33 million paid to NY farmers for DCP, and \$36 million in loan deficiency payments, along with \$28 million for commodity loan

programs. These dollars are then spun back into our rural economies by farmers, in order to pay for the rising costs of crop inputs, supplies, equipment, and family living. It is also important to recognize that the current Farm Bill has functioned as it was designed: to pay more money to farmers in times of low prices, and to pay out less when prices are high.

Some may argue that bio-energy production and a growing global economy will take commodity prices to a new plateau, eliminating the need for price support programs. While I agree that this may be possible, I would caution this will not happen overnight, and we must be sure to closely monitor the potential transition and its impacts on farms, ranches, and rural economies.

I am an active participant in the federal crop insurance program. I have purchased 70-100 Crop Revenue Coverage for the last ten years. In three of the last six years, severe weather greatly reduced our yields, and crop insurance kept me in business. I would strongly recommend increased subsidies for buy-up levels of federal crop insurances in lieu of crop disaster allocations.

In closing, I served as State Director for USDA FSA for 4 years from 2001-May 2005. During that time, I saw first hand the positive impact that commodity program payments have on all crop and dairy farms as well as rural economies all across our region. Any effort to balance payments to a wider cross section of agriculture should take into account the potential negative impact of payment reductions for crop and dairy producers.